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By Patty Wetli



Rep. Mike Quigley addresses gun violence at a meeting of the Old Irving Park Association.

(DNAinfo/Patty Wetli)

IRVING PARK — When he was first elected to office in 2009, Rep. Mike Quigley (D-IL) could count on the economy being the top issue with constituents. Now, it's gun violence.

Meeting Monday night with members of the Old Irving Park Association, Quigley fielded questions about education, partisan politics and foreclosures, but spent most of the evening talking gun control.

Ald. Tim Cullerton (38th), who last week presided over a public forum to address a recent fatal shooting in Portage Park, broached the potential for federal intervention.

"These gangs, they're no different in my view than Al-Qaeda," Cullerton said. "Is there any way to declare war on gangs?"

Quigley countered with a solution that may be unpopular with some of his peers: Cut the defense budget and pour those dollars into public safety, education and healthcare.

"We have 11 aircraft carriers. No one else has more than one. We have 125,000 troops in Eastern Europe — we are designed perfectly for the Cold War," he said. "You'd be safer if we spent less money on troops and more on police in Portage Park. We're spending dramatically too much to defend ourselves overseas and far, far, too little where we need it."

In the wake of the Sandy Hook shootings and the attention Hadiya Pendleton's death has brought to urban gun violence, Quigley believes Congress is prepared to take up the thorny issue of gun control.

"When I was a kid, what was your fear?" asked the congressman, who grew up in suburban Carol Stream. "It was 'She said no to the prom' or getting braces. Today, kids' biggest fear is getting shot."

Among the legislative initiatives that would limit access to guns is a bill Quigley has drafted to repeal the Tiahrt Amendment (authored by former Rep. Todd Tiahrt of Kansas), which requires the U.S. Justice Department to destroy records of firearms background checks within 24 hours — a loophole frequently exploited by criminals to make straw purchases, according to Quigley.

"You can go to a gun show in Indiana and there's no background check. They can be on a terrorist watch list...and you can still buy any gun you want," he said. "That's just madness."

